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**Part 1 ENGLISH SUBJECTS,
GENERAL PAPER**

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	3
Ordinary Level	
English Language	4
English Literature	9
Alternative Ordinary Level	
Further English Studies	12
Theatre Arts	14
Advanced Level	
English	19
Use of English	32
General Paper	33
General Studies	36

FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.

A separate booklet will be available shortly containing comments on question papers together with replies to the comments.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ORDINARY LEVEL

Subject 1100

Paper 1100/1 and 3

General Comments

Some examiners felt that there had been an overall decline in standards.

There was often a casual attitude to content, presentation and punctuation. Syntactical and grammatical errors were compounded by the excessive use of direct speech and colloquialism. Scripts with many merits, usually in vocabulary and imagery, were marred too often by a high incidence of mechanical error.

Detailed Observations

Paragraphing. There was frequent failure to organise and link material.

Sentence Structure. This was often slapdash, with misplaced or missing commas, inadequate use of the full stop and failure to employ even the simplest of clauses. Verbless sentences featured particularly in descriptive passages.

Syntax. There appeared to be an increase in faulty agreement.

Spelling. Misspelling sometimes defied elucidation. We read about, terranchal rain, camoflashed trucks, astrays, portrates, antisaption, discintrigated, once in alive time, I can vaguely remembre, American terrorists (tourists), and a high paractive child.

Idiom. Confused thought is apparent in some of the following:

This might show some light on the subject.

We could sing till the words come out of our ears.

Harsher crimes should be handed out.

Summer follows the Spring and all the birds that had appeared are now roasted and tanned by the sun as they blossom in their thousands.

Abroad we must avoid the cigarette made from the natural waists of camels.

He would have kittens if he thought Tom was having kittens.

Handwriting

This year's essays were memorable not for *bad* handwriting, but for pale ink, very fine biros and the proliferation of that secret feminine code, the 'i' with a circle above it instead of a dot. Full stops were almost invisible and the reluctance to make the up and down strokes of 'd', 'b', 'g' etc. stand out above or below the other letters made an apparently neat script almost impossible to read. Handwriting isn't penalised, but non-communication.

Punctuation

The most serious error, the comma for the full stop was less common this year. Indeed, some candidates seem to be afraid of the comma lest it should be out of place and used too many full stops instead. Semi-colons and colons were also used more widely and often correctly. Dialogue was often well punctuated.

Vocabulary

There was a conscious effort to vary the vocabulary in many cases. The learning of vocabulary lists, though worthy, can lead to sudden bursts of esoteric language amid stretches of unambitious expression, and when these same words appear again and again in the same centre one suspects that though the word has been memorised, its use in its proper context has not been practised.

e.g. 'She was gregarious and effavesant and because she had a veluptuous figure this made her very volitile'.

Relevance

Candidates can bend a story (their own or somebody else's) to fit almost any topic. Occasionally a recognisable tale from a well-known author is reproduced word for word, and, if recognised, which it often is as examiners are better read than many candidates suppose, the penalty is harsh. Some candidates have professional opening, and conclusion, which do not fit easily into the flatness of the intervening paragraphs and often make tenuous contact with the topic.

More common is *minor* irrelevance, where the writer wanders from the topic or deals with only part of the subject. If he or she would make a point of writing out the subject at the head of the essay it would help not only the writer to keep the topic in mind, but the examiner, who can reach the bottom of page one without the slightest idea of which topic has been chosen. If the candidate has forgotten to number the essay, he is in trouble indeed.

Openings and conclusions

Weaker candidates find it difficult to know at which point to start their composition. 'The Sights and Sounds of Summer' does not need to open with waking in the morning, a description of the toilet, the breakfast, the 'almighty rush' to the door and the realisation that it is a lovely summer day. A quick plunge into the topic creates immediate interest, e.g.

'This was what I had longed for all through the bitter winter and dreary spring ...' (Sights and Sounds of Summer)

OR 'As soon as I saw the house, I felt ...' (The Deserted House)

Re-appraisal of work

Many candidates, even good ones, make more errors on the first page than on any succeeding ones. This is probably caused by nerves or haste to get on with the work. 'Tailing off' towards the end is common among the weaker entrants, sometimes because they are rushed, but quite often because they have finished too soon and add feeble or repetitive matter to extend their work onto page three. There are also the rambling writers who will probably boast afterwards 'I wrote six and a half pages!' It is the quality that counts, not the length.

It is valuable, though perhaps too much to expect from the average sixteen year old, to have a rough idea of the closing sentence before writing the opening one. This gives the work a direction and a point to work towards. The very best candidates do this instinctively.

Despite these strictures, which are meant to help, not to criticise, there were some excellent, mature compositions, a large centre mass of acceptable middle-of-the-road writing, and few really illiterate scripts. There were lapses of taste with predictable violence and morbidity (Deserted House) or rape upon rape in 'When we first met I thought ...' None could come under the heading of obscene, but there was a suspicion in the reader's mind that they would have liked to shock the examiner!

Paper 1100/1 Comments on the Question Paper

1. *Life in outer space* attracted candidates across the ability range, the majority preferring a narrative to an expository approach. Many found direct speech necessary and some Centres had grasped neither the correct layout nor the details of punctuation. Only the best candidates displayed their technical knowledge and offered their views imaginatively in crisp, clear language.

2. *Grandfather running the marathon* Although this subject was extremely popular, a number of answers were dull and stereotyped. Nevertheless, the weaker candidates were able to write easily on this topic and display their limited skills to best advantage. The demands of marathon running were variously interpreted and distances to be covered were flexible. Candidates showed great affection for their grandfathers, often assisting with preparations, training, selection of diet and tactical support. There were some penetrating and witty comments on the attitudes of parents.

The best essays were lively and interesting; the worst, banal.

3. *Incident at the Zoo* was not popular. Candidates normally concerned themselves with the antics of escaping animals or lost children. Some stories were written with conviction and offered interesting views on family life or parental control. Occasionally the narrative was so over-dramatised that the events became ludicrous.

4. *Pupil influence in schools*. Discussions were generally sensible, if predictable, but often ideas were so limited that, in the longer answers, repetition was inevitable. Planning was, in many cases, haphazard and often the initial inspiration and enthusiasm were exhausted after the first page.

5. *The deserted house*. This very popular topic received adequate treatment from a number of candidates. They were aware of the need for descriptive detail, well-chosen vocabulary, a sense of atmosphere and a climax in the narrative.

Many candidates, however, laboured unimaginatively. Some interpreted 'deserted' as 'empty', so that any house left for however short a time – even overnight – qualified for inclusion. Stories of vampires, werewolves and black magic were encountered with some regularity.

6. *A craftsman at work* was another minority choice which produced some very readable essays. A piano-tuner, violin maker, farrier, glass blower and guitar maker made interesting appearances alongside the more popular carver or cabinet-maker. Candidates seemed to have the advantage of writing from an informed position and the use of language was generally incisive.

7. *School trips*. Most candidates stuck rigidly to the framework of the question, they dealt with food, local people, expenditure on ice-cream and coke exclusively, and that order. Those who wrote from personal experience generally had more to say and achieved higher marks.

8. *The postcard*. One examiner commented that many answers on this topic were enjoyable, interesting and well-written.

Other examiners found the compositions full of minor irrelevancy and sometimes difficult to relate to the question.

Escape stories were common, as were rides into the country where the ubiquitous deserted house might well stand in a nearby wood. One well-judged account of life in a Cambridge College was specially commended.

Paper 1100/3 Comments on the Question Paper

1. *Rush hour* appealed to all ability ranges and there were both descriptive and narrative essays, the latter possibly producing the better, more interesting compositions. There were some insincere, exaggerated accounts of behaviour on trains, buses and on the roads, with the city 'gent' prominent with bowler hat, brief-case and umbrella.

2. *Incident on a picket line*. The answers owed much to television coverage of recent strikes and perhaps for this reason were often well done. There was some very effective writing here with sensitive and thoughtful explorations of the feelings of those involved.

3. *Family life revolves round the pet*. This title provided something for most candidates, being most helpful to the less academic student who could draw from personal experience. Accounts varied from the simple routine of looking after rabbits, goldfish, cats, birds and dogs to the complications of training and schooling horses.

4. *Visiting someone else's school* was another minority choice and was at its most successful when a candidate was making a preliminary visit to a school he was about to attend, for, in these circumstances, he noticed things such as tidiness, discipline, uniform, friendliness and facilities. Some candidates could offer no more than bland observations often laced with deep suspicion.

5. *Someone pretending to be better than he or she is*. This topic produced writing that was direct, straightforward and sometimes vigorous. Some candidates were unnecessarily vindictive; some were forgiving as they offered excuses for minor faults and misunderstandings. There was little opportunity to reward elevated expression, when slang was prevalent. "Big fat slob", "a real slag", "wimp", "wally" and "bigmouth" were terms often in use.

6. *The sights and sounds of summer*. This was a popular topic and the responses were most varied. The obvious clichés were much in evidence, but there were some original approaches and some detailed observations. Superficial and insincere essays were met, and there were candidates who had little idea of seasonal work or the changing face of nature through the year.

7. *"When first we met ..."* was very popular and offered a lead into many different kinds of stories. There were, predictably, many boy-girl relationships described. Prospective step-parents provided another rich seam. Many narratives were written from the heart, and these proved to be interesting and often moving.

8. *Hooliganism and crime*. Good accounts of personal experiences of hooliganism came from those candidates who had been close to difficult situations. Accounting for these outbreaks of violence was not easy and draconian measures were frequently suggested to prevent further trouble.

Paper 1100/2

The subject-matter and the pleasantly intimate and humorous style engaged the interest of the candidates, so that they were not afraid to respond to questions in a lively fashion; among the better scripts the expression of answers reflected the positive and emphatic manner of Arlott's writing with advantage. On the other hand the work of the weaker candidates reflected, yet again, a lack of careful reading of both text and questions. The very weak exhibited an inability to grasp the point that the author was discussing, but too many others jumped to the wrong conclusion from partial understanding. The number of flat contradictions of the text was striking: winters were frequently 'cold' despite the text's

'not often really cold' – communications were 'non-existent' – so how could they also be expensive? Despite the motor-cars that Arlott watched disintegrating, there were said to be 'no cars on the island'. For some candidates the passenger boat *from* Torquay clearly suggested a tourist excursion or shopping expedition regularly taken *to* Torquay by the islanders, because for these candidates 'a weekly trip' had to mean just that, and a few even took 'staple diet' ('stable diet' in some instances) literally as food.

Once more the summary question revealed a wide variation in standard – from that good harvest of points couched in fluent writing to that prolixity of the weaker candidates which was evidence of their little experience in selecting material. Too many candidates lost marks when each summary began with a string of words about advantages and disadvantages, prompted by the wording of the question, suggesting that they lacked worthwhile practice in summary-writing. "Start answering the question at once, with no introductory statement" is the sort of advice which, if heeded, could make a dramatic improvement in the number of marks obtained. There were more overlength summaries than usual because of the inclusion of introductory material – often for each summary – and some candidates still engage in the laborious system of drafting and re-drafting answers with little or no subsequent benefit.

The standard of English expression was widely varied. There was much accurate writing – but there was much that was not, often the result of patent carelessness. Alderney provoked at least eleven mis-spellings and 'argument', 'entertainment' and 'ectacy' revealed the unwary. Examiners considered that those with a less than certain command of English were more in evidence this year than in most earlier years.

In other respects, most candidates were much as usual. Obedience to the rubrics, in general, was good; handwriting was no worse than usual, though sometimes quite abominable; and the great majority offered reasonably complete sets of answers.

Paper 1102/1: Adult Candidates

The general standard of the work showed a slight improvement. There was a noticeable lack of total incompetence, and such basic points as spelling, punctuation and syntax gave less cause for adverse comment than has been the case in the past.

Candidates seemed to find the essay topics to their taste, and there were many interesting answers on 'Vandalism' and on 'Shopping'. The latter gave full scope for humorous narrative. The main weaknesses in this question were a tendency to indulge in unacceptably lengthy introductions, such as the full recounting of the business of getting up, washing, dressing, having breakfast, and so on, as a preliminary to setting out for shops. Definitions of vandalism tended to be very wide-ranging, often to enable a candidate to discuss a topic dear to his heart, such as warfare or primitive cave paintings. There were some very pleasantly sincere, personal answers to 'An individual who has influenced your life'. There were also some that were both mawkish and unconvincing. Once again, it cannot be stressed too strongly that candidates who convey a note of individuality are those whose essays are most impressive.

Q.2 was answered satisfactorily, on the whole. Some candidates failed to strike the right note of formality that a report calls for, and there were examples of misplaced and unfunny facetiousness. Note form is not acceptable in this question, since it is basically a test as to whether candidates are capable of expanding the printed notes into a coherent report, with adequate synthesis of the material.

Q.3 usually settles the fate of candidates. The chief failing is an inability to read closely – both the passage and the questions. For instance, many candidates, in answering Q.3 (e), failed to refer to the context, and gave examples of how animals might be trained to acquire

manual skill. The summary in (a) was unparagraphed, incoherent, and frequently wandered off into the candidate's own views on the topic, rather than summarising the author's. There was also a tendency to include all the facts that could be listed within the word limit, irrespective of relevance. The synonym question was, as usual, answered inadequately. Many candidates failed even to identify what part of speech was involved, and provided words that did not fit grammatically into the context.

In general, sloppy sentence structure and the substitution of commas for full stops were prevalent. Woolly thinking produced such solecisms as: "A report on fire hazards and the way they could be improved". Slang and cliché, combined with wayward spelling, resulted in, "having a wail of a time", "in this day and age", "Been around for a long time" – and so on. "There" and "their", "where" and "were", still give trouble, and "would of" for "would have" is a perennial error.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

ORDINARY LEVEL

Subject 2000

Paper 2000/1

Examiners lamented the infrequent choice of *Richard II*, as it was considered to be a good text for 'O' level candidates. However, *Twelfth Night* was also a successful text, and had obviously been enjoyed by many who studied it. Chaucer proved a disastrous choice this year for some, not only because so many confused 'glotony' with greed – i.e. avarice – but also because many clearly did not know precisely what Chaucer's words meant, and were in consequence unable to paraphrase the passage in *Question 7*. Both *Typhoon* and *Barchester Towers*, though not very widely taken, were successful texts, particularly the latter, which produced many good and successful answers. *An Inspector Calls*, though perhaps it creaks a bit now, was on the whole another successful text, one examiner concluding that it had turned out to be 'an ideal text for many limited but earnest candidates'. Many examiners will be glad to see the last of this selection of Short Stories. For one thing, it seemed to invite too many 'social worker case history answers' and comments on 'Our Uncaring Community'. For another, it was felt that too often less able candidates had been given this text to study under the mistaken impression that it was a soft option. As usual, there was a wide difference of opinion on the poetry text, ranging from one examiner who wrote 'it produced a series of excellent answers, with splendid response' to another who said 'the more I mark poetry answers the more I wonder whether it should be on the syllabus at all'. However, most examiners felt that the poetry answers were being done rather better.

Comments on the paper were, on the whole, very favourable. The varied styles of questions were approved of, making it a well designed examination. Some examiners did point out that the choice of question by a candidate sometimes affected performance – *Questions 6 and 13* carried rather a high factual content, and *Question 8*, as indicated earlier, could be a disaster. Examiners felt that there was reasonable parity between *Questions 1 and 4* – always a source of anxiety to the Chief Examiners. The 'experimental' *Question 10* was widely welcomed, and felt to be successful, as was *Question 12*. Answers to *Question 15* suggested that perhaps evil is much more memorable to candidates than good. Some candidates penalised themselves in the Short Story section by their selection